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# THE JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW

OCTOBER, 1895

## SOME ASPECTS OF RABBINIC THEOLOGY : THE "LAW."

THE Law derives its authority from the kingdom. For this, according to the Rabbis, is the meaning of the scriptural words, "I am the Lord thy God," or "the Lord your God," with which certain groups of laws are introduced (e. g. Exod. xxii. 2 and Lev. xviii. 2); that is, God makes his people conscious of the fact of his claims on them because of their having received his kingdom, saying unto them, "You have received my kingdom in love." "Yes" and "Yes" answers Israel, wherefore God says, "If you have received my kingdom, you receive now my decrees<sup>1</sup>."

The current notions about the Law or Torah are still so misleading, that often as the question has been discussed in this Review a brief exposition of its real meaning with the Rabbis will not be superfluous. There appears to be an uneasy feeling among theologians, "that if the Psalter be indeed of post-exilic origin, then it is certain that Judaism or Scribism cannot have been wholly the evil thing we have thought<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Torath Kohanim, 85 d ; Mechilta, 67 a and b.

<sup>2</sup> See Bruce's *Apologetics*, p. 272, and cp. Smend, *Lehrbuch der Alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, VIII.

Still this does not prevent them from enlarging upon the "Night of Legalism," the darkness of which is made the more visible by the utter absence of any religious documents calculated to throw light upon this terribly long night, from which we only suddenly emerge by a miracle supposed to have taken place about the year 30 of our era.

If the study of comparative religion has for its purpose the finding of parallels rather than the gathering of contrasts, we might reason that an age which gave birth to Christianity could not have been entirely devoid of at least a sprinkling of great sages, great saints, great religious enthusiasts. But nothing of the kind is generally allowed. We learn just enough of the time to prepare us for the strange modes of Paul's interpretation of the Scriptures, the narrow particularism of Peter and James, and the legalistic and Judaic heresies into which the first Christians were bound to relapse and against which the Church had to defend herself. In one word the whole age is a preparation for the Anti-Christ.

Now it cannot be denied that the religious history of the intervening age between the Maccabeans and Jesus is very obscure. For its literary *Hebrew* remains—which alone enable us to form a clear judgment—are very scanty, only a few sayings having come down to us from that period. But if Rabbinism be the logical and legitimate outcome of Legalism, the theology of the Rabbis in its most prominent and spiritual features should be allowed to throw some backlight on that obscure period. Examined by this light we shall find that Legalism was neither the evil thing commonly imagined nor led to the bad consequences assumed by our theologians. Nor has it ever constituted the whole religion of the Jew, as defined by most modern critics.

It must first be stated that the term Law, or *Nomos*, is not a correct rendering of the Hebrew word *Torah*. The legalistic element, which might rightly be called the Law, represents only one side of the *Torah*. To the Jew the word

Torah means a teaching or an instruction of any kind. It may be either a general principle or a detailed injunction, whether it be found in the Pentateuch or in other parts of the Scriptures—or even outside of the canon. The juxtaposition in which *Torah* and *Mitzvoth*, Teaching and Commandments, are to be found in the Rabbinic literature, implies already that the former means something more than merely the Law<sup>1</sup>. *Torah* and *Mitzvoth* are a complement to each other, or as a Rabbi expressed it: “they borrow from each other, as wisdom and understanding—charity and lovingkindness—the moon and the stars”—but they are not identical<sup>2</sup>. To use the modern phraseology, to the Rabbinic Jew, *Torah* was both an institution and a faith. I shall treat them separately: first, *Torah* and then the *Mitzvoth*.

It is true that in Rabbinic literature the term *Torah* is often applied to the Pentateuch to the exclusion of the Prophets and the Hagiographa<sup>3</sup>. But this is only for the purpose of classification. It is also true that in a certain measure the Pentateuch is put on a higher level than the Prophets—the prophetic vision of Moses having been, as the Rabbis avow, much clearer than that of his successors<sup>4</sup>. But we must not forget that for the superiority of the *Torah*, they had the scriptural authority of the *Torah* itself (Num. xii. 6–8, Deut. xxxiv. 10), whilst on the other hand they could not find in the Prophets anything deprecatory of Moses’ superior authority. They may, occasionally, have felt some contradictions between the Prophets and the *Torah*, but only in matters of detail, not in matters of principle<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Berachoth, 31 a ; Makkoth, 23 a ; Aboth, III, 11.

<sup>2</sup> See Exod. Rabbah, XXXI.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Megillah, 31 a ; Baba Bathra, 13 b, and elsewhere.

<sup>4</sup> See Jebamoth, 49 b ; Lev. Rabbah, I.

<sup>5</sup> See the well-known passages about Ezekiel in Shabbath, 13 b, and Menachoth, 45 a. The contradictions are there reconciled to the satisfaction of the Rabbis at least. A contradiction which they did not try to reconcile was that between Isa. vi. 1 “I saw the Lord sitting upon

Of any real antagonism between Mosaism and "Leviticalism" and Prophetism, which modern criticism has brought to light, the Rabbis were as little conscious as the Apostles. With the Rabbis, the Prophets formed only a complement or even a commentary to the Torah, which, indeed, needed explanation, as we shall see. Hence the *naïveté*, as we may almost call it, with which the Rabbis chose, for reading on the Day of Atonement, the 58th chapter of Isaiah, one of the most prophetic pieces of prophetism—as the accompanying lesson for the portion from the Pentateuch, Leviticus xvi—the most Levitical piece in Leviticalism<sup>1</sup>.

But even the Pentateuch is no mere legal code, without edifying elements in it. The book of Genesis, the greater part of Exodus, and even a part of Numbers are simple history, recording the past of humanity on its way to the kingdom, culminating in Israel's entering it on Mount Sinai, and their subsequent relapses. The book of Deuteronomy, as the "Book containing the words of exhortation" (Tochachoth)<sup>2</sup>, forms Israel's *Imitatio Dei*, consisting chiefly in goodness<sup>3</sup>, and supplying to Israel its confession of faith, whilst the Book of Leviticus—marvel upon marvel—first proclaims that principle of loving one's neighbour as one's self (Lev. xix. 18) which believers call Christianity, unbelievers, Humanity.

The language of the Midrash would seem to imply, that at a certain period there were people who held the narratives of the Bible in slight estimation, looking upon them as fictions (Piyutim) and useless stories. The Rabbis, however, reject such a thought with indignation. To them the whole of the Torah represented the word of God, dictated by the

a throne," and Moses in Exod. xxxiii. 20 "For there shall no man see me, and live" (Jebamoth, 49 b. See Jolowicz's *Himmelfahrt, &c. des Propheten Jesaiah*, p. 7, Leipzig, 1854). But it is significant that it is the wicked Manasseh who saw this contradiction.

<sup>1</sup> See Montefiore, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 510 and 511.

<sup>2</sup> Sifre, 64 a.

<sup>3</sup> See Sifre, 85 a; Mechilta, 37 a; and parallels.

Holy Spirit, suggesting moral lessons everywhere, and embodying, even while it speaks of the past, a history of humanity written in advance<sup>1</sup>. "The Book of Generations of Adam," that is the history of the Genesis, in which the dignity of man is indicated by the fact of his having been created in the image of God, teaches, according to Ben Azai, even a greater principle than that of Lev. xix, in which the law of loving one's neighbour as one's self is contained<sup>2</sup>. Another Rabbi deduces from the repetitions in Gen. xxiv the theory that the conversation of the servants of the patriarchs is more beautiful than the laws even of later generations<sup>3</sup>. Another Rabbi remarks that the Torah as a legal code would only have commenced with Exod. xii, where the first (larger) group of laws is set forth, but God's object was to show his people the power of his work, "that he may give them the inheritance of the heathen" (Ps. cxi. 6), and thus, in the end, justify the later history of their conquests<sup>4</sup>.

The Book of Genesis, which contains the history of this manifestation of God's powers, as revealed in the act of creation as well as in the history of the patriarchs, and leads up to the story of the Exodus from Egypt, is, according to some Rabbis, the book of the covenant which Moses read to the people (Exod. xxiv. 7) even before the act of revelation. To come into the possession of this book (the book of Genesis), which unlocked before them one of the inner chambers of the king (or revealed to them the holy mysteries of God's working in the world), was considered by the Rabbis one of the greatest privileges of Israel, given to them as a reward for their submission to God's will<sup>5</sup>.

Thus *Torah*, even as represented by the Pentateuch, is

<sup>1</sup> See Genesis Rabbah, LXXXV; Sifre, 33 a; Sanhedrin, 99 b.

<sup>2</sup> Torath Kohanim, 89 b, and parallels. Cp. Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, I, 720.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis Rabbah, LX.

<sup>4</sup> See Tanchuma, ed. Buber, I, 4 a. Cp. Rashi to Genesis i. 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Mechilta, 63 b. Cp. Midrash Shir Hashirim, I, 4 on *הביאני המלך* *הדריו*.

not mere Law, the Rabbis having discerned and appreciated in it other than merely legal elements. Moreover the term Torah is not always confined to the Pentateuch. It also extends, as already indicated, to the whole of the Scriptures on which the Rabbis "laboured" with the same spirit and devotion as on the Pentateuch. We must not be mistaken about this point. Christianity has not, as some writers apparently think, been the first to discover the Prophets, somewhat in the same way that the Germans claim to have discovered Shakespeare. That lessons from the Prophets almost always accompanied those taken from the Pentateuch is a well-known fact<sup>1</sup>, as likewise that the Talmud Chacham or the disciple of the wise, had to beautify himself with the knowledge of the twenty-four books of which the Bible consists, even as a bride adorns herself with twenty-four different kinds of ornaments<sup>2</sup>. That this injunction was strictly fulfilled by the student is clear from the facility and frequency with which the Rabbis quoted the Prophets and the Hagiographa.

A striking instance may be seen in the *Mechilta*, a small work of not more than about seventy octavo pages when stripped from its commentaries: it has about one thousand citations from the Prophets and the Hagiographa.

"The sinners in Israel," the Rabbis complain, "contend that the prophets and the Hagiographa are not Torah, but are they not already refuted by Daniel (ix. 10) who said, "Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his Toroth which he set before us by his servants the prophets." Hence, the Rabbis proceed to say, Asaph's exclamation in Ps. lxxviii, "Give ear, O my people, to my Toroth<sup>3</sup>." Note, in passing, that this Psalm, which claims to be Torah, is nothing but a resumé of Israel's

<sup>1</sup> See Zunz, *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge*, p. 3 (2nd ed.), and Schürer's *Geschichte*, II, 380 f.

<sup>2</sup> See Exodus Rabbah, XLI.

<sup>3</sup> See Midrash, Tillim LXXVIII, and Tanchuma תנחומי, § 1. Probably the Samaritans are the "Sinners in Israel."

history. With the Rabbinic Jews, the Hagiographa formed an integral part of their holy Scriptures. The prophets of truth and righteousness were, as can be seen from the benediction preceding the weekly lesson from the Prophets, God's chosen, in the same way as the Torah, as his servant Moses, and his people Israel—the depository of revelation<sup>1</sup>. In olden times they had even a special benediction before they began to read either the Prophets or the Hagiographa, running thus: "Blessed art thou, our Lord God, who hast commanded us to read the holy writings<sup>2</sup>." This was quite in accordance with their principle regarding prophecy as "the word of God<sup>3</sup>," and the continuation of his voice heard on Mount Sinai<sup>4</sup>, a voice which will cease only with the Messianic times, when the earth will be full of the knowledge of God and all the people of the Lord will be prophets<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See *Daily Prayer Book* with the Rev. S. Singer's Translation, p. 149. In סוברים, XIII (ed. Müller), the words וישראל עמו are omitted.

<sup>2</sup> See סוברים, XIV, and Dr. Müller's *Notes*, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> Shabbath, 138 b.

<sup>4</sup> See Sifre, 92 a, and parallels given in the מ"ע. MH. וקולו חשמנו בקל. Cp. Exod. Rabbah, XXIX, 6, the opinion of רש"י. See also Sifre, 135 b ור"ש "Lord of the world thou hast written, If a man put away his wife," &c., which is a verse in Jer. iii. 1. Cp. Blau, *Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> See Jerushalmi Megillah, 70 d, and the Commentaries. Cp. also Maimonides' Mishneh Torah הלכות מניין חנוכה, II, 18 and the דשנה הרא"ר. The passage to the effect that the Pentateuch will retain its importance even after the Messiah has come, is, as so many other passages of a similar nature, undoubtedly the result of the opposition to Paulinistic Christianity, the most fierce attacks of which were directed against the Law, demanding its abolition. The answer of the Rabbis was therefore that even the authority of the Messiah himself will not prevail against that of Moses. In this sense—as opposition against the teaching of Paul—must also be understood the passage in Jerushalmi Berachoth, 3 b and parallels, where the prophet, so to say, is required to bring his imprimatur from the Torah חותמו של יסמכתין של, the prophet without such a legitimation being so very probably an antinomianist. Hence also the effort made by the Rabbis to prove that the Pentateuch already indicated the teachings of the Kethubin. See Weber, 79, the reference to Taanith must be 9 a.



It is in harmony with this spirit—the Prophets and the Hagiographa being a part of Israel's Torah—that the former are cited in Rabbinic literature with the terms “for it is said” or “it is written” in the same way as the Pentateuch. Again, in the well-known controversy about the Scriptural authority for the belief in resurrection, both the Prophets and the Hagiographa are quoted under the name of Torah; and the evidence brought forward by them seems to be of as much weight as that derived from the Pentateuch<sup>1</sup>. In the New Testament they also occasionally appear under the title of Nomos or Law. To the Jew, as already pointed out, the term Torah implied a teaching or instruction, and was therefore wide enough to embrace the whole of the Scriptures<sup>2</sup>.

In a certain manner it is extended even beyond the limits of the Scriptures. When certain Jewish Boswells apologized for observing the private life of their masters too closely, they said: “It is a Torah, which we are desirous of learning<sup>3</sup>.” In this sense it is used by another Rabbi, who maintained that even the everyday talk of the people in the Holy Land is a Torah (that is, it conveys an object-

<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin, 91 b; see also Mechilta, 34 b and 40 b. Cp. Blau, as above, pp. 16 and 17.

<sup>2</sup> See Schürer's *Geschichte*, II, 253, note 17, for the references from the New Testament. Following Weber (p. 79) Schürer seizes the opportunity of making the remark that there is perhaps nothing more characteristic of the full appreciation of their importance on the part of the Jews than that they too (the Prophets and the Hagiographa) were not first of all to the Jewish conviction didactic or consolatory works, not books of edification or history, but were considered chiefly as Law, the substance of God's claims upon his people. So far Schürer, which of course only proves again to what misconception the rendering of Torah by Law must lead. Besides we find that the Rabbis had such specification for the various books in the Bible as ספר יציאת מצרים for the Exodus (see Blau, as above), חומה for Deuteronomy (see above), the Psalms again are called the Book of Praises or Hymn Book, whilst the whole of the Kethubin are the Books of Wisdom (Pesikta d' R. Kahana, 158 b), whilst Isaiah was chiefly characterized as the “work of consolation” (Baba Bathra, 14 a).

<sup>3</sup> Berachoth, 62 a.

lesson). For the poor man in Palestine, when applying to his neighbour for relief, was wont to say, "Acquire for thyself merit, or strengthen and purify thyself" (by helping me)<sup>1</sup>; thus implying the old axiom—that the man in want is just as much performing an act of charity by receiving as his benefactor by giving. In the east of Europe you can, even to-day, hear a member of the congregation addressing his minister, "Pray tell me some Torah." The Rabbi would never answer him by reciting verses from the Bible, but would feel it incumbent on him to give him some spiritual or allegorical explanation of a verse from the Scriptures, or would treat him to some general remarks bearing upon morals and conduct.

To return to Torah proper. It is the Torah as the sum total of the contents of revelation, without regard to any particular element in it, the Torah as a faith, that is so dear to the Rabbi. It is the Torah in this abstract sense, as a revelation and a promise, the expression of the wisdom of God, which is identified with the wisdom of Prov. viii, thus gaining, in the course of history, a pre-mundane existence, which, so to speak, formed the design according to which God mapped out the world. Said Rabbi Hoshayah: "It is written of Wisdom, 'Then (before the world was created) I was with him *amon*, and was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.' The word *amon* is to be read *uman*, meaning architect. For as a king employs an architect when he proposes to build a palace, and looks into his plans and designs to know where the various recesses and chambers shall be placed, so did God look into the Torah when he was about to create the world<sup>2</sup>." How far the idea is originally Jewish is not here the place to discuss. Nor is its meaning quite clear when subjected

<sup>1</sup> Lev. Rabbah, XXXIV.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis Rabbah, I, and parallels. Cf. Bacher, *Agada der Palästinen-sischen Amoräer*, I, 107, and his references to Freudenthal and the JEWISH QUARTERLY, III, 357-60. See also Prof. Cheyne's *Job and Solomon*, pp. 160-62.

to a strict analysis. One of the later commentators of the Midrash tries to connect it with the *Tzimtzum* theory, that is, the limitation-mystery of the later Cabbalists, according to which the act of creation was an effluence of God's ineffable goodness and mercy—when he withdrew himself into himself, and thus revealed from himself the universe. But it is not quite clear what part the Torah plays in this mystical system<sup>1</sup>. As far as any definite meaning may be attached to such hazy and nebulous ideas, it may perhaps be reduced to this: that the Torah having been long destined to become a main factor in God's government of the world, its creation must have been predesigned by God before he called the world into existence. In this sense the Torah is classed with other creations of God which are endowed with pre-mundane existence, as Israel, the throne of God (kingdom?), the name of the Messiah, hell and paradise (or reward and punishment), and repentance<sup>2</sup>. With regard to repentance, the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer teach: "When God was designing the world he found no firm basis for it until he created the quality of repentance<sup>3</sup>." The same thought of the impossibility of a world without a revelation may also have been present to the mind of the Jew when he spoke of the pre-mundane existence of the Torah.

Plausible, however, as this explanation may be, it is a little too sober and would hardly account for that exaltation of the Torah, which is such a prominent feature in Jewish literature. As soon as the Torah was identified with the Wisdom of Proverbs, the mind did not rest satisfied with looking upon it as a mere condition for the existence of the world. Every connotation of the term Wisdom in the famous eighth chapter of Proverbs was invested with life and individuality. The Torah, by this same process, was

<sup>1</sup> See פירוש מהר"ן to Genesis Rabbah, I.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis Rabbah, I, § 4, and all the parallels given there, which are very varying.

<sup>3</sup> See פ"ד, III, and the notes of ר"ל.

personified and endowed with a mystical life of its own, which emanates from God, yet is partly detached from him. Thus we find the Torah pleading for or against Israel, as on the occasion of the destruction of the Temple, when the Torah was called to give evidence against Israel, but desisted from it at the instance of Abraham, who said unto her, "My daughter, were not my children the only ones who received thee, when other nations refused to do so?"<sup>1</sup> Nay, even single letters of the alphabet are endowed with a separate life, enabling them to act the same part almost as the Torah<sup>2</sup>. The whole later mystical theory which degenerates into the combinations of letters to which the most important meaning is attached, takes its origin from these personifications.

This notion of the personification of the Torah never hardened into an article of faith. Its influence is less felt in dogma than in literature, particularly in the legends and scriptural interpretations bearing on the subject of the revelation on Mount Sinai. We must, at least, consider them in their main features.

First, the day of revelation is considered as the day on which earth was wedded to heaven. The barrier between them was removed by the fact that the Torah, the heavenly bride, the daughter of the Holy One, was wedded to Israel on that day<sup>3</sup>. The simile is carried further, and even the feature of the capture of the bride is not missing,—the verse in Ps. lxviii. 19, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive," being interpreted as referring to Moses, who ascended to heaven and captured the Torah, in spite of the resistance of the angels, who were most reluctant to allow the Torah, the desirable treasure, to be taken away from among them<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, our planet is con-

<sup>1</sup> See פתחתא דאליה דרבי. See also Lev. Rabbah, XIX, and parallels.

<sup>2</sup> See Genesis Rabbah, I. Cp. Pesikta Rabbathi, 109 a.

<sup>3</sup> See Pesikta K., 104 b, and Exod. Rabbah, XXX, 5 and XXXIII, 7.

<sup>4</sup> See Shabbath, 89 b; Pesikta Rabbathi, 98 a and b, and Exod. Rabbah, XXVIII, and parallels.

stantly trembling lest Israel should imitate the example of their heathen neighbours, which would signify their doom to destruction. Hence the attention of the whole universe is directed to this glorious act. When God gave the Torah we read that the creatures of the firmament paused in their flight, those of the earth ventured not to lift up their voices, the waves of the boisterous seas ceased to roll, and the angels interrupted their eternal song of "Holy, Holy, Holy<sup>1</sup>,"—heaven and earth listening to the good message.

This listening of the universe suggests the universalistic feature of the Sinaitic revelation. Though magnifying Israel for their readiness to receive the Torah, and strongly blaming the Gentiles who refused to subject themselves to the word of God, so that a certain animosity comes down from Mount Sinai against the worshipper of idols<sup>2</sup>, these legends still betray a universalistic tendency as to the real and original purpose of the revelation. Thus with reference to Isa. xlv. 19, God is supposed to have said: "I have not spoken (the word of the revelation) in secret. I did not reveal it in hidden places and in dark places of the earth. I did not even postpone the giving of the Torah till Israel should enter into the Holy Land, lest Israel might claim it for themselves and say that the nations of the world have no share in it; (in other words, it was not God's intention to make it a national religion). I gave it in open places, in the free desert, so that every man feeling the desire might receive it. Nor did I say *first* to the children of Jacob, 'Seek ye me<sup>3</sup>.'" For, as we read in other places, the Holy One came first to the sons of Esau and offered to them the Torah. These asked, "What is written in it?" God answered, "Thou shalt not kill." "We cannot accept it," they rejoined,

<sup>1</sup> Exod. Rabbah, XXIX.

<sup>2</sup> Shabbath, 89 a.

<sup>3</sup> See Mechilta, 62 a and 66 b, the whole passage beginning ייחזו במדבר. The text is not quite correct. See x"ח to the passage, and cp. Bacher, *Agada der T.*, II, 164, note 1; and Aruch ed. Kohut, s. v. פננב. See also Yalkut Machiri on Is., p. 156, reading פננב instead of פננב. The MH. reads יהוה בקשני לא עשייה הפוזיקי אלא נחתי כחן שורה בצדה.

"killing being our profession." Other nations objected to it on account of the seventh and eighth commandments, immorality and the appropriation of other men's possessions being the purposes of their lives, and the motive-springs of their actions, and so they said: "For the knowledge of thy ways, we have no desire—give thy Torah to thy people<sup>1</sup>."

It is rather characteristic of these legends, which probably reflect the attitude of the Rabbis towards the missionary enterprises of their time, that it is chiefly the moral part of the decalogue to which the nations objected. Esau is broad enough for general principles and will admit the Jewish God into his pantheon, if he submit to the process of accommodation and evolution so that he can share his honours with other gods. Esau objected to the "Do not's." These were too definite to allow of a wide interpretation in which the wisdom of Edom excelled, and might thus interfere with Esau's calling, his gladiators, his legions, and the policy of his procurators.

Thus Mount Sinai becomes the place in which God reveals himself to the world, and Israel undertakes the terrible responsibility of bearing witness to this fact. "If you will not make known my divinity to the nations of the world, even at the cost of your lives, you shall suffer for this iniquity," said God<sup>2</sup>. By this acceptance of the Torah, Israel made peace between God and his world<sup>3</sup>, the ultimate end being that its influence will reach the heathen too, and all the Gentiles will one day be converted to the worship of God<sup>4</sup>; for the Torah "is not the Torah of the Priests, nor the Torah of the Levites, nor the Torah of the Israelites, but the Torah of Man (Torath ha-Adam), whose gates are open to receive the righteous nation which keepeth the truth and those who are good and upright in their hearts<sup>5</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> See *Mechilta*, *ibid.*; *Sifre*, 142 ב' אברהם רבה, III; *Pesikta Rabbathi*, 99 b, and parallels.

<sup>2</sup> See *Lev. Rabbah*, VI, and commentaries.

<sup>3</sup> *Gen. Rabbah*, LXVI.

<sup>4</sup> See *Berachoth*, 54 b.

<sup>5</sup> *Torath Kohanim*, 86 b.

Another important feature in these legends and interpretations is the fact that the revelation was an act of grace and the effluence of God's goodness. When the princes of the world heard the thunders and lightnings which accompanied the revelation they were frightened, thinking the world was to pass through another judgment as it did in the days of the deluge, whereupon they consulted their prophet Balaam. He calmed their fears, saying: "Fear not, ye kings, he who rests in heaven has revealed himself to his children in his glory and his mercy. He has appeared, to give to his beloved people Torah, wisdom and instruction<sup>1</sup>, and to bless them with strength and peace<sup>2</sup>." In another passage it is stated that God appeared on this occasion in the aspect of an instructing Elder, full of mercy<sup>3</sup>. Like rain and light, the Torah was a gift from heaven of which the world is hardly worthy, but which is indispensable to its maintenance<sup>4</sup>.

The gift was a complete one, without any reserve whatever. Nothing of the Torah, God assures Israel, was kept back in heaven<sup>5</sup>. All that follows is only a matter of interpretation. The principle held by the Rabbis was that the words of the Torah "are fruitful and multiply<sup>6</sup>." Thus the conviction could ripen that everything wise and good, be it ethical or ceremonial in its character, the effect of which would be to strengthen the cause of religion, was at least potentially contained in the Torah. Hence the famous adage, that everything which any student will teach at any future time, was already communicated to Moses on the Mount Sinai, as also the injunction that any acceptable truth, though discovered by an insignificant man in Israel should be considered of as high authority as if it had emanated from a great sage or prophet or even from Moses himself. It requires but an earnest religious mind to

<sup>1</sup> See *Pesikta Rabbathi*, 95 a.

<sup>3</sup> See *Mechilta*, 66 b.

<sup>5</sup> *Deut. Rabbah*, VIII.

<sup>2</sup> See *Sifre*, 142 b.

<sup>4</sup> *Gen. Rabbah*, VI.

<sup>6</sup> See *Chagigah*, 3 b.

discover all truth there<sup>1</sup>. For the Torah came down from heaven with all the necessary instruments: humility, righteousness and uprightness—and even her reward was in her<sup>2</sup>. And man has only to apply these tools to find in the Torah peace, strength, life, light, bliss, happiness, joy and freedom<sup>3</sup>.

The Torah was, in short, all things to all men. To the Theosophist, who had already come under the sway of Hellenistic influences, it was the very expression of God's wisdom, which would, as far as it is consistent with Biblical notions, elevate it into an emanation of God's essence, and endow it with a pre-mundane existence, reaching almost to infinity. To the mystical poet, with his love for the picturesque, it was the heavenly bride adorned with all the virtues which only heaven could bestow on her, at whose presentation to Israel the whole universe rejoiced, for her touch with mankind meant the wedding of heaven to earth. What, then, could the poor mortal do better than to learn to know her and to fall in love with her?

To the great majority of the Rabbis who retained their sober sense and cared more about what God requires us to be than about knowing what he is, the Torah was simply the manifestation of God's will, revealed to us for our good; the pedagogue, as the Rabbis expressed it<sup>4</sup>, who educates God's creatures. The occupation with the Torah was, according to the Rabbis, less calculated to produce schoolmen and jurists than saints and devout spirits. "Whosoever labours in the Torah for its own sake, merits many things . . . he is called friend, beloved, a lover of God, a lover of mankind; it clothes him in meekness and fear (of God), and fits him to become righteous, pious and

<sup>1</sup> Sifre, 79 b.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. Rabbah, *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> See Pesikta K., 105 b; Mechilta, 36 b, 47 a; Sifre, 82 b and 83 b; Exod. Rabbah, XXXVI.

<sup>4</sup> See Gen. Rabbah, I. Cp. אבות עם הלאמר ירושלמי &c. by R. חיים מקרבן. בזה חיים מקרבן קין חורה 3 b and 4 a, the passage given there from the Mechilta, and Ishmael.



upright ; it keeps him far from sin, brings him towards the side of virtue and gives him sovereignty and dominion and discerning judgment. To him the secrets of the Torah are revealed ; he becomes a never-failing fountain, he grows modest and long-suffering, forgives insults and is exalted above all things<sup>1</sup>." On the other hand his individualism does not make him exclusive, his freedom does not involve the subjection of others, the world rejoices in him, for he enriches it with sound knowledge, understanding and strength<sup>2</sup>. His life is one continuous mourning for the glory of God and the glory of Israel (at present obscured) and a constant longing for their salvation<sup>3</sup>, whilst his activity (a continuation of the revelation) is making peace between heaven and earth<sup>4</sup>. In sooth Israel has recognized the strength (or the secret) of the Torah ; therefore, they said : " We forsake not God and his Torah, as it is said : ' I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste ' (Song of Songs, ii. 3)<sup>5</sup>."

In fine, to the Jew the Torah was anything but a curse. He understood how to find out the sweetness and the light of it and of the Law which formed a part of it.

S. SCHECHTER.

<sup>1</sup> See חרב"א פ' י"ז and פרק קנן הורה.

<sup>3</sup> See חרב"א פ' ר.

<sup>5</sup> See Exod. Rabbah, XVII.

<sup>2</sup> ח"פ, *ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> Sanhedrin, 99 b.

*(To be continued.)*